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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1421

INFO RUEBBA/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 3605

BT

ASUNCION 4377

UNCLASSIFIED

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINS, PA

SUBJ: REPORTED ARREST OF EPIFANIO MENDEZ FLEITAS, MOPOCO LEADER

REF: (1) BUENOS AIRES 7946 (2) STATE 253765

1. CHARGE ON OCTOBER 24 DISCUSSED WITH UNDER SECRETARY OF INTERIOR BESTARD AND SEPARATELY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER NOGUES REPORTED ARREST AND POSSIBLE EXTRADITION TO PARAGUAY OF EXILED HEAD OF DISSIDENT COLORADO PARTY (MOPOCO) LEADER EPIFANIO MENDEZ FLEITAS AND SON EPIFANIO MENDEZ VALL.

2. BESTARD SEEMED GENUINELY TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY THEIR REPORTED ARREST. AS TO THEIR BEING HANDED OVER TO THE GOP, HE SAID STROESSNER WOULD NEVER ALLOW IT. BECAUSE OF MENDEZ FLEITAS' POPULARITY AMONG THE RANK AND FILE OF COLORADOS, HE SAID THE PRESIDENT DID NOT WANT MENDEZ FLEITAS ON PARAGUAYAN SOIL. HARD-LINERS AND SYCOPHANTS (CHUPA MEDIAS) IN THE PARAGUAYAN MILITARY HAD IN THE PAST PROPOSED KIDNAPPING MENDEZ FLEITAS, GOIBURU AND OTHER MOPOCO LEADERS, AND STROESSNER'S REACTION HAD BEEN VOILENTLY NEGATIVE. STROESSNER HAD SAID HE DID NOT WANT TO BE COMPARED TO TRUJILLO -- AS IN THE GALINDEZ CASE. BESIDES, THOUGH BITTER POLITICAL ENEMIES, STROESSNER SUPPOSEDLY STILL CONSIDERED MENDEZ A FRIEND AND HOPED EVENTUALLY FOR A RECONCILIATION.

3. NOGUES EXPRESSED SIMILAR LACK OF INFORMATION AND DISBELIEF THAT THE MENDEZ COULD BE HERE.

4. TO BOTH, CHARGE MADE CLEAR HE WAS MERELY PASSING ALONG THIS REPORT SO THAT THE GOP WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED BY A SPATE OF INQUIRIES STIMULATED BY MENDEZ' AMERICAN RELATIVES WHO WERE NATURALLY DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER THE REPORTED DISAPPEARANCE OF MENDEZ AND HIS SON IN ARGENTINA. FURTHERMORE, IF THE REPORT THAT THEY WERE IN PARAGUAY WERE WITHOUT FOUNDATION, THE GOP MIGHT WISH TO BE ABLE TO REFUTE IT PROPERLY.

5. EMBASSY WILL MAKE INQUIRIES AMONG PRIVATE GROUPS AND REPORT ANY INFORMATION ON HE TWO MENDEZ.

BRIGGS

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret T. Grafeld, Director

() Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part () In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date

Declassify on

Reason